

In the Claims

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Original). A stainless steel structural member for a blockformer apparatus, which structural member has at least one surface along which, in operation, curd slides, wherein at least part of the at least one surface is a micropeened surface having substantially sloping undulations when viewed on a microscopic scale, said surface having been obtained through a micropeening treatment.
2. (Original) A stainless steel structural member according to claim 1, wherein the micropeening treatment has been carried out with stainless steel balls.
3. (Original). A stainless steel structural member according to claim 1, wherein the micropeening treatment has been carried out with substantially undamaged round glass beads.
4. (Original). A blockformer apparatus having incorporated therein a stainless steel structural member having at least one surface along which, in operation, curd slides, wherein at least part of the at least one surface is a micropeened surface having substantially sloping undulations when viewed on a microscopic scale, said surface having been obtained through a micropeening treatment.
5. (Original). A blockformer apparatus according to claim 4, further comprising a guillotine blade having a micropeened surface.
6. (Original). A blockformer apparatus according to claim 4, further comprising either an elevator platform, or a guide means, or both, having a micropeened surface.
7. (Original). A blockformer apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the at least one structural member is a stainless steel drainage tube having an inner micropeened surface.

8. (Original). A blockformer apparatus according to claim 7, further comprising a guillotine blade having a micropeened surface.

9. (Original). A blockformer apparatus according to claim 7, further comprising either an elevator platform, or a guide means, or both, having a micropeened surface.

10. (Original). A method for manufacturing a stainless steel structural member for use in a blockformer apparatus, which structural member has at least one surface along which, in operation, curd moves, comprising:

at least partly finishing the structural member in a conventional manner to obtain a conventional surface roughness; and

subjecting at least part of said at least one surface to a micropeening treatment.

11. (Original). A method according to claim 10, wherein said micropeening treatment uses stainless steel balls.

12. (Original). A method according to claim 11, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter between 50 and 5000 μm .

13. (Original). A method according to claim 12, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter between 100 and 1500 μm .

14. (Original). A method according to claim 13, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter between 600 and 800 μm .

15. (Original). A method according to claim 14, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter of approximately 700 μm .

16. (Original). A method according to claim 10, wherein said micropeening treatment uses substantially undamaged round glass beads.

17. (Original). A method according to claim 16, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter between 50 and 5000 μm .

18. (Original). A method according to claim 17, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter between 100 and 1500 μm .

19. (Original). A method according to claim 18, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter between 600 and 800 μm .

20. (Original). A method according to claim 19, wherein said stainless steel balls have a diameter of approximately 700 μm .

21. (New) A metal structural member for a blockformer apparatus, which structural member has at least one surface along which, in operation, curd slides,
wherein at least part of the at least one surface is a micropeened surface having substantially sloping undulations when viewed on a microscopic scale, said surface having been obtained through a micropeening treatment.

22. (New) A blockforming apparatus for preparing blocks comprising curd, the apparatus comprising:

a column comprising first and second spaced apart ends, curd being received at the first end of the column and passing along an interior thereof toward the second end of the column; and

a cutting blade configured to separate a portion of curd that has passed along the interior of the column from curd remaining within the column, the cutting blade having a micropeened surface comprising microscopic substantially sloping undulations.